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UNCLAS BANGKOK 001924

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV AND G/IWI: L KHADIAGALA

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SUBJECT: THAILAND: CHILD MARRIAGE

REF: STATE 36341

1. (U) The legal age of marriage for men and women in Thailand is 18. Persons under 18 may be legally married with the consent of both parents or a single surviving parent or legal guardian. In some cases, the Court can approve a legal underage marriage. This is usually granted when requested by a couple which includes a woman who became pregnant under the age of 18 wishes to marry before the birth of the child.

2. (U) Underage marriage among the general population is not a significant problem. However, the practice persists in unknown numbers in some hill tribe communities in Northern Thailand and occasionally in Thailand's minority Muslim population. None of the government offices or NGOs contacted by post were able to provide statistics on child marriage. Most embassy contacts expressed concern about teenage sex and unwanted pregnancy, which sometimes results in underage marriage but most often couples just live together. Underage marriage and/or teen pregnancy often means that teenagers drop out of school and are forced to find work away from traditional home and family support structures.

3. (U) Post is unaware of any U.S.-funded initiatives that aim to reduce the incidence or address the negative affects of child marriage specifically. Some anti-trafficking programs focusing on women's empowerment seek to educate women about their legal rights and therefore address issues of child marriage. Local NGOs focused on women's rights can address this issue through education and outreach to hilltribe and Muslim women, but also to various groups of young women most vulnerable to exploitation in the poorer Northeast and Northern areas of the country.

BOYCE